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TO THE PEOPLE *of* ALABAMA

AN ADDRESS BY THE
ALABAMA EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Issued by the
Department of Education
Montgomery. Ala.

[1905]

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To the People of Alabama:

This address, prepared by the Alabama Education Committee, a voluntary organization having for its objects the promotion of public education in Alabama, is given to you with the hope that, after a careful perusal, your interest and enthusiasm in this great work will be heightened.

Supt. Isaac W. Hill, the able Chairman of the Committee, has kindly offered to issue the address as an official utterance of the Department of Education, and as such, in addition to the force given it by the personnel of the Committee, is commended to you for a conscientious consideration.

Additional copies of the address, if desired, may be procured by addressing the Secretary.

HARRY C. GUNNELS,
Secretary.

Montgomery, Ala.

AUG 21 1906
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ADDRESS

ISSUED BY THE

Alabama Education Committee

AT MONTGOMERY, DEC. 6, 1904.

To the People of Alabama:

The Alabama Education Commi'tee, organized under the auspices of the State Department of Education, with the co-operation of the Southern Education Board, and having for its objects the promotion of public instruction, takes this method of calling attention to some defects in the school system, and of suggesting such remedies as will produce more satisfactory conditions. Even a brief consideration makes plain the inadequacy of the system to meet the needs of a great and growing people.

1. ORGANIZATION OF SYSTEM.

FORMER CONDITIONS NOT FAVORABLE.

1. While the law looking to the establishment of a system of public schools was enacted half a century ago, the conditions which existed prior to the year 1874. rendered impossible rapid and substantial growth. During the last thirty years, considering defects in the plan of organization, considerable progress has been made. It is generally conceded, however, that Alabama is far behind

many other States in making provision for the preparation of an intelligent and patriotic citizenship. Advancement has been retarded by many adverse conditions, among which may be mentioned lack of means, sparseness of population, absence of passable highways, presence in the body politic of a large ignorant electorate, remembrance of the abuses of taxation during the period of reconstruction, and the fixed necessity for the maintenance of a dual system.

CHIEF CAUSE OF LACK OF PROGRESS.

2. But the chief cause of lack of satisfactory progress lies in that feature of the system which leads the people to rely upon the State government for maintenance and supervision, rather than upon community interest and effort. This mistake was made in the very beginning, and constitutes the chief defect in the system as it exists today.

Indeed, the State should do its part, but the history of education elsewhere proves conclusively that it is an unwise and hurtful policy to look to that source for everything needed. Wherever such a policy has prevailed, the people have come gradually to rely upon the general government for the performance of duties that should be regarded as individual or local. If we would meet the obligation that presses upon us, we must modify this policy.

II. SUPERVISION OF SCHOOLS.

STATE SUPERVISION.

1. Without competent supervision the best results are impossible. This is as true in educational affairs as in business and industrial matters. While there has been great advancement in the work of supervision—State, county, and district—there yet remains room for improvement.

It is unreasonable to expect efficient supervision from men who know nothing of supervisory work. The States that are making greatest educational progress are those that fix qualifications for the office of Superintendent. Continued competent State supervision would be guaranteed if the Superintendent of Education were required by law to be a professional educator of experience, of recognized ability, and of high character; and what is true of State supervision is equally true of county supervision.

When we wish to have performed any work not educational, we employ a man especially trained for that service; for the bench, expert lawyers; for the pulpit, ordained ministers; for the bank, trained accountants; for the factory, skilled workmen; for the school room, licensed teachers; then when a man is wanted to administer a system of schools, why not choose an experienced educator? If the people will not perform this duty voluntarily, why not require them by law to do it? Without such legal requirement, the people, under the excitement of political contests, overlook frequently the matter of qualification. The constitutional provision that limits the State Superintendent of Education to one term is unwise. The office of Superintendent should be removed

as far as possible from the influences of partisan politics.

COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION.

2. For the first time in the history of the State, the county has been made the unit of school supervision, and a County Board of Education placed in charge. This Board has almost plenary power, and should be composed of intelligent, patriotic men — men who have deeply at heart the interests of the public schools. Too much importance can not be placed on this proposition. Under authority of this Board the County Superintendent largely acts, and the success of his work will be handicapped unless the right kind of a Board is behind him.

COUNTY SUPERVISION.

3. Some of the county superintendents of education are men of considerable practical experience in school management; some of them are not. Heretofore, many of them have been but little more than disbursing agents, altogether unnecessary officers, since the county treasurers could have disbursed the funds equally as well.

So long as we continue to elect to this position men who know nothing of school management, who have not made of education a study, and who could not obtain a teacher's certificate of the lowest grade, even, just so long will we have inefficient supervision. A qualified county superintendency is one of our greatest educational needs, and under the new Constitution, it is possible. The next Legislature should be asked to enact a law establishing it.

Yet, when the paltry compensation is considered, County Superintendents are not en-

tirely blamable for devoting so little time to the performance of their duties. In most cases they receive mere pittances. With few exceptions, their salaries should be doubled, and more than doubled. The County Superintendent should not only be qualified for his position, but he should also be required to devote his entire time to the work; and he should be paid a salary sufficiently large to enable him to do this.

The minimum term of office for County Superintendents should be four or six years, and they should be kept in service so long as they perform their duties in a satisfactory manner. The custom of forcing them to quit office about the time they have learned to perform their duties well, has greatly retarded the cause of education.

DISTRICT SUPERVISION.

4. There is no more important office in the system than that of District Trustee. Upon the District Trustee devolves many responsible duties. How necessary, then, that he be intelligent, honest, sober, energetic, and patriotic. He should be chosen with special reference to the duties to be performed.

III. MATERIAL EQUIPMENT.

LOCATION AND GROUNDS.

1. In selecting a location for the school, great care should be exercised. The question of accessibility should not be overlooked. The greatest convenience to the greatest number should be the chief consideration. Personal or local influences too frequently govern. The result is, the establishment of unnecessary schools, or small, short-term, rather than large long-term schools.

The grounds should be made attractive, and, in rural communities especially should be sufficiently extensive to make possible experiments in elementary agriculture. The school-garden properly conducted will go far toward bringing about love for country life and its elevating influences. The tendency of population to drift from the country to the city is one of the most alarming signs of the times. If children were taught the beauties, pleasures and possibilities of rural occupations, this tendency would be checked. This instruction can be given, in a measure, by the wise use of school grounds.

BUILDINGS AND APPARATUS.

2. School houses should not only be conveniently located, but they should also be planned and constructed with special reference to comfort, attractiveness, and health. In many communities the school buildings are nothing more than miserable makeshifts. Any old outhouse is considered sufficiently good. The importance of heat, light, comfort, and ventilation is ignored. The laws of health are often violated.

But however good and costly and attractive the building may be, the best of work by pupil and teacher cannot be accomplished without the necessary apparatus. Too little attention has been given to this subject, not only in country, but also in city schools. Such apparatus as is used is generally purchased by the teacher, and is paid for out of her meagre salary. As a rule, especially in buildings like those described, there is no such equipment, no maps, no pictures, no globes, no desks, no blackboards, nothing.

Notwithstanding this lack of necessary equipment of grounds, buildings and apparatus, the children are expected to advance

rapidly, and to take great delight in attending school. Is it a matter of wonder that they frequently become inattentive, indifferent, disgusted, and that, as a consequence, they quit school and grope through life in ignorance and superstition? Is it a matter of surprise that the best qualified teachers decline to accept service amid such surroundings?

School houses should be made as comfortable and attractive as possible. Indeed, of all public buildings, they should be the most comfortable and attractive. Where they are made healthful, cheerful and beautiful, children will delight in attendance and study. In behalf of the children, your children, we appeal to you to see that the school houses are properly constructed and furnished.

CONSOLIDATION AND TRANSPORTATION.

3. In locating schools and building houses, the matter of consolidation of schools should not be overlooked. Wherever tried, and the experiment has been made in several States, it has often been found to be more economical and otherwise more satisfactory to consolidate all the schools of the district into one school. Where this is done, pupils living beyond a fixed reasonable distance are transported to and from the schools at public expense. In other words, it has been found to be less expensive to convey the children to the schools than to carry the schools to the children. Wagons prepared for the purpose are used for transportation.

Such consolidation and transportation make possible more commodious and better furnished buildings, higher and better graded courses of study, larger and better qualified teaching forces, and longer school terms. That five teachers can render more

efficient service in a school of two hundred and fifty than one teacher can render in a school of fifty children, is manifest without argument

Wherever the condition of the public roads makes it possible, we urge the consolidation of schools. The Legislature may, by a two-thirds vote of each House, authorize the use of school funds for transportation purposes. In the absence of legislative action, there is nothing to prevent the raising of personal subscriptions for such purposes.

IV. TEACHING FORCE.

QUALIFICATIONS.

1. Special preparation for business, for law, for medicine, for journalism, for the ministry, and for almost every other calling is recognized as a necessity. Since teaching has to do with the body, the mind, the soul, the life, special preparation for that service is of paramount importance. For that reason Normal schools and colleges are maintained, and for that reason examination laws are enacted and enforced.

Notwithstanding all the precautions taken, teachers frequently are poorly prepared. While there has been in the past decade marked advancement in the qualifications of teachers, there is room for further improvement.

The children are entitled to the best of teaching. All things else being equal, the professionally trained teacher is most likely to render efficient service. School officials should give preference to those teachers who have made the best preparation for their work.

2. Lack of adequate preparation among teachers may be accounted for in many ways, but the chief cause lies in the lamentably short sessions, ranging from ninety-three days in the colored to one hundred and six days in the white schools; and in the ridiculously low average of salaries paid, ranging from $23 in the colored to $37 a month in the white schools. Think of securing high qualifications and efficient work for such terms of service, and for such rates of compensation. The average day laborer is better paid for he has employment throughout the year. If teachers were not of all people the least exacting, most of the schools would have to close.

COMPENSATION.

Is it possible that the people care less for the proper education of their children, than for the cultivation of their lands, the working of their mines, or the keeping of their live stock? We believe not, but the figures quoted should be seriously pondered. When we consider the small salaries received, it is little wonder that teachers soon tire of their labors and go to other states, or drift into other and more lucrative callings.

Teachers in the rural schools, even, should be paid salaries sufficiently large to enable them to live comfortably, to accumulate a reasonable competency, and to spend their vacation in making better preparation for the performance of their duties.

V. SOURCES OF REVENUE.

1. As has been suggested, the error of relying entirely upon the State for revenue with which to conduct the schools, was made in the organization of the system. In the view of many an ideal plan for raising reve-

THE NATION.

nue would be that in which the Nation, the State, the county, and the district would contribute in the proper proportion. It should be as much the concern of the Nation to have an educated citizenship in the State, as of the State to have such a citizenship in the county or district, for every citizen, educated or ignorant, has a part, directly or indirectly, in making and executing the laws, local, State, and National.

But increased National aid, while many regard it as just and wise, seems to be remote. For the present, if not for all time, we must look for maintenance to the State, the county, and the district.

THE STATE.

2. Considering wealth and population, the State is doing its full duty in the matter of appropriations. A sum equal approximately to 50 per cent. of all taxes levied upon real and personal property, is expended annually for education. The amount is more than a million dollars. The State could not reasonably be expected to increase materially its appropriation.

Yet, the funds are altogether inadequate. The per capita apportionment amounts to only $1.45, and from this must be taken the commission of the County Superintendents. The average for each pupil in attendance is only $4.41. Think of maintaining an adequate system with that sum! The idea is absurd! It is little wonder that the buildings are make-shifts, that the terms are short, that the teachers are poorly prepared and more poorly paid, that the percentage of illiteracy is high, and that expenditures for the support of pauperism and the punishment of crime are great.

It would be unfair to make the comparison between Alabama and some of the other

States, but there is no injustice in the comparison which follows. Taking annual average attendance as the basis, Iowa spends per pupil $24.63; Nebraska, $23.08; Kansas, $17.59; Maryland, $18.81; Oklahoma, $13.44; Florida, $10.41; Virginia, $8.91; Louisiana, $8.82; Texas, $9.95; Mississippi, $6.48; Alabama, $4.41. Only two States show a greater percentage of illiteracy than Alabama. What a sad contrast! What a stupendous appeal to duty!

Then, if the State is doing all that can be expected in the matter of appropriations from the general treasury, wherein lies the difficulty? A reference to the history of education in other States reveals the answer. In the absence of the exercise of the power of local taxation, no State has been able to maintain an efficient system. Those States that have made the greatest progress have relied most on this policy, some of them raising over 90 per cent. of their funds in this way.

After giving to the subject a most careful consideration, we are of the opinion that the only way by which Alabama can meet her supremest obligation lies in giving, not only to counties, but also to districts, the power of taxation for educational purposes. If the people of a community desire to levy a tax upon their property for the purpose of building a school house, or for the purpose of supplementing the State and county fund, in order that their children may enjoy better advantages, should they not have the power to do so?

The right of local self-government is a principle for which the people of Alabama have always contended. Yet, in the matter of supplying education for their children, it is a right which the fundamental law largely denies to them.

To prepare the way for further progress, each county should, before the meeting of the next Legislature, levy the one mill tax now authorized. Such action by counties would prove to the Legislature that the people are ready to support the schools when empowered to do so. That eighteen counties of the State have already taken this important action is a most gratifying record.

In behalf of the children, and for the future peace, happiness, and prosperity of the commonwealth, we advise that counties proceed at once to the performance of this important duty.

CONCLUSION.

The history of the world teaches unmistakably that intelligence and productivity accompany each other; that ignorance and criminality go hand in hand; that education and civilization march side by side. Existing conditions prove our State to be no exception to this rule.

Now that the electorate has been entrusted to the more intelligent elements of our population, we appeal to the people to pursue such a course as will place Alabama at the head of the list of States educationally, as she stands first alphabetically, and in so many natural advantages.

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